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THE ADMINISTRATION OF CITY SCHOOLS.

A survey of public school administration in the larger cities of America reveals a surprising degree of uniformity in the general principles of organization. This uniformity is doubtless due to the influence of the older systems of the eastern states upon the school legislation of the West, as well as to the similarity of fundamental conditions in certain important respects. The early district school system has developed throughout the country along similar lines though it has been modified by the growth of a central control exercised by state officials. In recent years, however, the feeling has arisen that the school systems of our larger cities should have a more distinctly municipal form of organization in order to meet the demands of a rapidly growing population; a series of experiments has therefore been made looking toward a better adaptation of city school administration to the changing needs of the times. It is our purpose to discuss briefly some of the more important of these changes and to note the results obtained. The conclusions drawn are based upon the discussion of six important points, upon which the simplicity and efficiency of the newer systems depend, as follows:

1. The relation of the school system to the city government.
2. The number of school boards.
3. The size of the board.
4. The method of choosing the board.
5. The powers exercised by the board.
6. The duties of supervisors.

The relation of the municipal government to the schools has been placed first because it is *the* question of modern school organization; upon the answer given to this question depends the solution of all the minor questions which follow it.

Two general solutions offer themselves. According to the one plan the school system may form a simple department of the city government, presided over by officials who are appointees of the mayor. In the other system the school management is taken out of the sphere of city government entirely and given to a series of independent authorities with a separate legal and administrative basis. At present the second plan is still in operation in some of our large cities and has proved detrimental to the interests of all concerned. The school system has practically been considered as a separate organization not subject to the administrative control of the city authorities and yet dependent upon the city for financial support. Even the control exercised by state authorities has been comparatively insignificant, owing to the fact that city conditions have presented peculiar obstacles to strict supervision by an outside authority. So far has this separation been carried that in some of the states it has been held that the state legislature could not pass special regulations for the government of schools in particular classes of cities because of the constitutional prohibition against special legislation and because the school system was not a part of city administration. The separation of school management from general city administration has doubtless been due to two reasons, first, the general anxiety to divorce the school system from politics, and, second, the desire for elective officials, arising from the democratic tendencies of the last century.

As for the first reason, the desire to keep politics out of school affairs, the mere mention of such a plan is enough to show its failure when the actual conditions of our school system are known. The second reason for such a separation, *i. e.*, the democratic trend of our past development, is one of considerable force. It is certainly true that all over the United States the tendency has long been toward the maintenance of separate school authorities. There has been, especially in the country districts, a natural desire to

specialize local government, to give the management of roads, sanitary affairs, poor relief and schools to separate administrative officials and, by making these offices elective, to secure a more complete responsibility. Such a system has long been in vogue in rural administration and has been attended with satisfactory results.

Now this method may well be suited to the needs of a rural government, but it is thoroughly impracticable in a large city. The conditions of city life utterly preclude the existence of numerous independent, disconnected, administrative bodies. There must be one authority in which the others all find a common source and head—there must be unity. In the early part of the century, when the desire for frequent elections was at its height, the purely theoretical notion was that, by separating the different municipal departments and electing separately the heads of each department and bureau, a more direct responsibility of those officers would be secured, but in long years of practical experience this notion has proved most erroneous and even disastrous. The voter's attention is already too much occupied with other things to estimate carefully the merits of each candidate; the greater the number of offices to be filled, the greater will be this evil. Why, therefore, should we insist upon electing the machinery of a school system in addition to the officers of city government? The conclusion is obvious that from a political standpoint it is highly inexpedient to separate school administration from city government and to demand that the voter shall watch both. Again, leaving the political standpoint aside and judging from the point of view of efficient administration, the minute subdivision of authority has been found to prevent the practical, harmonious co-operation of all departments and, therefore to lead to administrative discord. Theoretically it seems highly desirable that each department should, as far as possible, be distinct and independent and should be responsible only to the people, but if this

independence is achieved at the cost of general efficiency, the practical sense of men will demand a change. This fact has been clearly recognized by all the larger and more progressive cities in America, and in consequence of a universal movement toward increased responsibility and greater efficiency, the old systems of administrative separation and chaos have been superseded by the consolidation or union of administrative authorities under a common executive head. This movement has been followed by a marked improvement in municipal government.

In the face of such considerations can it reasonably be said that the department of education is an exception to all the other known facts? Can it be maintained that there is something so peculiar about ordinary school management as to require a form of organization which has been abolished in nearly all other branches of city government? This inquiry brings us to the other arrangement of the relation between municipality and school organization, viz., that in which the school system is not a separate institution, but forms a part of the city government. The whole tendency of the times is, as has been said, toward a more practical, definite fixing of responsibility, and this can only be secured by increasing the power of the city executive. The mayor should appoint the head of the department of education. This would at once place the school system in its proper position as a part of the municipal administration. The importance of such a change and its influence upon the other features of school management will be seen at once. If the school system is to be a component part of the city government, then it is obvious that a school board is not absolutely necessary. The present functions of the board could revert to the chief of the department. The board, if it continued to exist, might be given advisory powers only. The chief of the department or "city superintendent" would have entire charge of school affairs in the city, and under him, as in many cities at the present time, a

“business manager” would be entrusted with the erection and care of school buildings, repairs, supplies, and in general with the purely business side of the system.

One of the principal features of this plan is the importance attached to professional officials. In recent years, with the increasing complexity of public business, the field of activity for honorary officials has been considerably restricted. It is not reasonable to demand that honorary officials should neglect their own affairs in order to transact the public business, yet this is necessary in many branches of the public service for those who wish to acquire a thorough, practical knowledge of their respective offices. So long as the public business to be transacted does not call for more than ordinary business insight, the honorary office, filled by a competent business man, is entirely satisfactory. When, however, the public service has reached a high degree of complexity, requiring not only exceptional business management, but also considerable technical knowledge, the services of professional officials are absolutely essential. This is the present condition of our school system. Every effort will doubtless be made to maintain an honorary board at the head of the school administration nevertheless the imperative need of the system is for a single head with professional training.

The two general plans of school government outlined above vary widely from each other in their effect upon the relations of the system to the regular city government. Between these two extremes there are numerous modifications, *e. g.*, in New York City, although a board of education still exists, the mayor exercises considerable control over school affairs, in that he appoints the local boards. The new charter of San Francisco grants the mayor a similar power over the central board, but there is a marked improvement over other systems, in that the board consists of only four members. In both of these instances and in many other similar cases the principle of union between the city government and the

school system is carried out. If the force of these considerations be admitted, it will be seen that the existence of a board or council to advise or assist the head of the department is of relatively less importance. The great point to be gained is the placing of the real power in the head of the department and his subordination to the city executive. This done, an advisory council with limited powers may well be placed at the side of the chief.

After the relation of the schools to the city government, the next important question is as to the *number of boards* necessary for the proper administration of city schools. The problem has in the main been solved in favor of a single board. This central board directs the entire system of the municipality and exerts powers which vary greatly in extent.¹ Of the more important American cities only three at present retain the old system of local boards, viz., Philadelphia, Pittsburg and New York. In New York the local boards exist because of the union of Manhattan with other sections under the new charter. The school boards of the annexed sections or boroughs, having enjoyed an independent existence under the old order were allowed to exist as subordinate local boards by the framers of the new charter. There are four of these local boards, representing Manhattan and the Bronx, a board composed of twenty-one members, Brooklyn with forty-five members, Queens with nine members, and Richmond with nine members, respectively. In Philadelphia and Pittsburg each ward forms a school section and elects a local board, with the astounding result that in Philadelphia forty-two school boards are necessary to do the work which in San Francisco is performed by a single board of four men. The absurdity of this condition is evident. The existence of these local boards in a large city means the distribution of favors, of odd jobs and appointments among a multitude of petty authorities. The excuse is that the system affords

¹ See Powers of Board.

local self-government. Can it be possible that the school affairs in different sections of a large city are so radically different from each other as to necessitate all this cumbersome administrative machinery? The experience of those cities which have adopted the single board answers this question most emphatically. Here again, we are met by a conflict between theory and practice. Practical experience has shown conclusively that the idea of minute subdivision of authority, when applied to the government of large municipalities, is radically wrong, and may be even disastrous in its consequences.

The third important question is in regard to the *number of members* of the board. The practice of American cities has varied widely in this respect. Out of twenty large municipalities only seven have school boards of twelve and under, the others ranging from sixteen on up to forty. The large size of these bodies is to be explained from historical reasons. The board was copied largely from the model of legislative bodies, and as such was composed of the representatives from different municipal sections. Here again the idea of the representation of localities is seen, but in this instance with some real basis, since it is in this central board that the appropriations to different local schools are made. As new sections were added new members were also added to the board, until the present ungainly and cumbersome body resulted. In considering the improvement of our school administration, the size of the board must be looked upon as a point of great importance. It is undoubtedly true that in the multitude of counselors there is wisdom. The difficulty in applying this proverb to the school board, however, lies in the fact that the members are not counselors, but active executive agents with power not only to resolve but to carry their resolutions into execution. Here lies the fundamental weakness of our present systems. When the counselor leaves his legitimate field of advisor and attempts to take positive action on a wide

range of complex and even technical matters, then the smaller the number so acting the better. The celebrated maxim upon which the entire French system of public administration has been erected is, that *action* belongs to one person, *deliberation* to many. If the school board is to exist it must be cut down to a convenient size.

It needs no evidence further than the common knowledge of every man to prove that a large legislative body is cumbersome. The experience of all boards of government is that the larger the body, the greater the difficulty of action and the less the amount of business which may be transacted by that body. The day of government by oratory has passed. A small board of from six to eight members would act more expeditiously and with much less friction than our present boards. Aside from these considerations it is a well-known fact that the large size of most governmental boards prevents the clear, definite fixing of responsibility, and thereby tends to laxity of administration. All collective bodies are prone to shift responsibility. Under the present system of committee work and with the crowded conditions of legislative activity, it is remarkably easy for the real advocates or enemies of a measure to conceal their identity. The same holds true of administrative commissions and boards. The citizen, therefore, experiences an ever-increasing difficulty in examining the records of his representatives, so that political responsibility is now easily shirked by the members of all collective bodies in government.

Throughout the state and municipal systems there may be seen a gathering up of the scattered threads of power; instead of the large, unwieldy commissions formerly appointed, the newer bodies are of smaller size, and, in many instances, a bureau under the direction of a single official rather than a board, has been established. This general tendency, which might be called a tightening of the reins of power and responsibility, is well illustrated in the

national government by the permanent commissions of interstate commerce and of civil service, of five and three members respectively, the single commissioners of labor, census, and the fish commissioner; in the state governments by the small commissions or single officials now charged with such affairs as education, highways, food inspection, health, factory inspection, etc.; finally, in the municipal government the establishment of smaller boards, and especially of bureaus directed by one official for the administration of sanitary, school, and other affairs. From these considerations it may be concluded that the weight of experience is against the large board and that the successful operation of small boards in various cities proves that a large number of members is unnecessary.¹

The method of choosing the board is at first sight a matter of no great importance, but there can be no doubt that this question may exercise considerable influence over the character of the body. In a majority of the large American cities the board is elected, yet the wisdom of such a course may well be doubted. Popular election of the board is open to the strong objection already mentioned, viz., it imposes on the voters the added burden and responsibility of examining a long list of candidates or of taking candidates on faith. The method of choosing the board now practiced in Philadelphia, viz., appointment by the judges, is not acceptable, if it be true, as has been contended above, that the department of education is a part of city government. The board of judges have been compelled to undertake many administrative matters of an unwelcome nature and among the most unwelcome have been the granting of retail liquor licenses and the appointment of the school board. The judiciary would certainly not suffer if these obligations were transferred to other authorities. Following the general lines of municipal progress already marked out by other

¹ The school board of San Francisco has four members, that of Cleveland seven, and that of St. Louis twelve, etc.

municipalities, the appointing power should be vested in such a way as to conduce to the unity of power and responsibility in the city government. There is only one way in which this can be done, viz., by conferring the power of appointment upon the mayor.¹

The Powers of the Board.—This is the crucial point in school administration. The board as it exists to-day in nearly all of our large cities is called upon to perform executive and legislative acts of the greatest variety. It must choose teachers, janitors, architects, etc., it must make contracts and watch building operations, and in many cases it must even adopt text-books. Now there are some things which even a school board cannot well do. In the words of the superintendent of schools in St. Louis: "The school department of a large city, with its disbursement in small amounts of funds amounting possibly to millions of dollars per year, has about it all the features of a very large business concern which cannot be attended to in detail in the leisure hours of any class of honorary officers, no matter how intelligent, honest and well qualified. The business side of a large system of public schools, aside from educational matters, involves a stupendous amount of work and, if it were to be conducted directly in detail by the board of education, would constitute a drain on the time of these honorary officers, which would not allow them to conduct any business of their own. . . . No board of education could directly judge of the qualifications of teachers nor of the merits of text-books. In the matter of building and repairs, too, and the furnishing of supplies, while they are of more general character, there is nevertheless a professional knowledge of detail involved, which the average citizen, who has not made these departments a specialty, cannot be expected to possess." A line of separation must be drawn somewhere between those things which may be left

¹ This is the practice in San Francisco, Chicago, New York (as regards the local boards), in St. Paul, etc.

to a collective body or board and those which can best be performed by a single person. The powers now possessed by the board must be carefully classified and those requiring detailed or technical knowledge must be transferred to special authorities.

While it is not the province of this report to work out the points of detail in such a plan, a broad, general classification may nevertheless be suggested. The board should only be entrusted with those duties and powers involving deliberation and discussion, *e. g.*, local school legislation, the determination of school policy, the general supervision of school affairs, and perhaps the distribution of appropriations. All other powers, especially those involving concentrated individual effort, attention to minute details and special technical or business training, should be left to professional officers. Such a division of labor would take from our boards of education many of the powers which they now possess. The most important changes would take place, first, in what may be termed the business management, and, second, the direction or supervision of instruction. The initiative along these lines has already been taken by several large cities, both West and East. In Boston, Cleveland, St. Louis, New Orleans, and other large cities, the powers of the board have already been changed in the way described; while in Chicago a strong commission appointed to recommend improvements in the city schools has reported emphatically in favor of a similar change. With this evidence showing the thoroughly practical nature of the suggested modifications, it is of importance to know what disposition has been made of the powers surrendered by the board.

Business Management.—One of the greatest difficulties met with under the present system is the management of ordinary business affairs, contracts, etc., connected with school administration. The practice of giving all these matters into the hands of a large assembly like the board is

to say the least, not business-like. Under the modern methods, as practiced in the cities just mentioned, these affairs are entrusted to a special professional agent, with the title of "business manager," "director," "superintendent of buildings," etc. This official is usually appointed by the board, is subject to its directions and acts as its executive agent in all matters relating to the construction, repair and maintenance of school buildings and grounds. The amount of discretion given to the business manager varies widely in the cities named. In Boston the schoolhouse agent, as he is called, is subject to considerable interference on the part of the committee on schoolhouses, while in St. Louis, Cleveland, and in the plan proposed by the Chicago Commission, he is given great latitude, his acts being, of course, subject to the approval of the board at any time. The St. Louis-Cleveland-Chicago system is in this respect much superior to that of Boston, in that the former secures freer play for the technical knowledge of the professional official. If it be considered necessary to have a check upon the action of the manager, such a check is given in the provision requiring the consent or approval of the board in important matters. The Chicago Commission proposed that the manager should have the power of appointing architects, engineers, janitors and subordinate officials, of awarding contracts, etc., subject to the board's approval. This plan is already in operation in other cities. In justification of this system it may be said that it has long been tried in all the more important business corporations and has been found highly successful. No stronger proof of its adaptability to the field of school business can be given.

In addition to the business manager, or schoolhouse commissioner, one city, St. Louis, has appointed a financial agent, called the "supply commissioner," whose duty it is to issue all supplies to the schools and to keep an account of the same. The duties of this officer, however, are of

essentially the same character as those of the business manager, and the maintenance of a separate office therefore seems unnecessary and inadvisable.

Superintendent of Instruction.—The office of superintendent is not a new one, but has long existed in all the principal cities of America. It is possible, however, so to limit and restrict the powers of this official that the utility of the office is almost destroyed. The only useful purpose served by the maintenance of such an office is the establishment of an efficient executive control over the immediate work of instruction; if this executive power is to be denied to the superintendent, or if it is to be so hampered by interference as to make its enforcement difficult, then the main object of executive power is defeated, and the office sinks to the position of a clerkship. Under the new system, however, the duties of this office have been greatly increased and extended. The superintendent in the cities above mentioned is entrusted with the entire direction of instruction. This includes the appointment and removal of teachers, attendance officers, etc., the issuance of certificates, subject to the approval of the board, and the direct control of teaching. Here again, the Cleveland-St. Louis-Chicago system seems preferable to that of Boston, since the former gives to the superintendent the power to determine text-books, courses of study, apparatus, etc., while in Boston such matters are decided directly by the board. In practice, however, the actual difference is comparatively slight, since in St. Louis the board has the right of approval or rejection, and the Boston rules stipulate that the superintendent shall be given a hearing before the board acts.

It will doubtless be urged against these changes that it would be impossible to secure good men as members of the board if that body were deprived of its most important powers. Such, however, is by no means the case. The board still remains as an advisory body with the power of

final decision in certain important matters, but it is relieved of all the matters of technical routine which have been the chief stumbling-block in the past.

Supervisors.—Whether or not the guiding power in the school system be placed in the hands of a central official, such as the superintendent, it is necessary to have some regular supervision over the work of the local schools as well as a means of easy communication between local and central authorities. Such means of communication and supervision are afforded in the systems above described by a corps of trained supervisors acting as assistants to the superintendent and appointed by him. It is the duty of these officials to communicate instructions from superintendent to principals and teachers, to inspect the various schools and report upon the efficiency of teachers. In some instances, notably in Boston, the supervisors acting together as a board, conduct certain grades of examinations, recommend the adoption of text-books, maps, apparatus, etc. This general method of supervision has shown itself to be of great practical value, especially in those cases where the superintendent has been made the real head of the school system.

The conclusions of this paper may be briefly summarized as follows:

First. The school system should be a bureau or department of the city administration and should be directed, as such departments are, not by forty large boards, but by a single official.

Second. A single board with limited powers should assist and advise the head of the department.

Third. Such a board should be as small as circumstances will permit, and should, at most, have not more than six members.

Fourth. The head of the department and the board should be chosen by the mayor.

Fifth. There should be a careful and practical division

of the powers now exercised by the board, those requiring technical or detailed knowledge and training should be transferred to professional officials, *i. e.*, the superintendent of instruction and the business manager or superintendent of buildings. Among such powers are the appointment of teachers, determination of text-books, apparatus, etc. (superintendent), and the letting of contracts, appointment of janitors, etc. (business manager). The experience of other cities is well-nigh conclusive in this regard.

Sixth. There should be a corps of trained supervisors or assistants to the superintendent for the purpose of directing and reporting upon the immediate progress of instruction. This is necessary in order to keep the executive head of the system thoroughly informed at all times.

Against the plan outlined above it will be repeatedly urged that it would concentrate a tyrannical power in the hands of the mayor, a power which might be abused with disastrous results. This is true. It is possible that a highly concentrated power may be and has been misused in such a way as to be intolerably oppressive. Precisely therein lies the remedy. With the concentration of power comes the only possibility of responsible government in modern cities. A host of petty despots may escape responsibility and may work great evil, but when power and responsibility are once definitely fixed in a single head, all uncertainty ceases and a clear issue is presented to the voter.

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